

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

FAMOUS SCOUTS AND PIONEERS.

THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF JAMES P. BECKWITH, Mountain Scout, Pioneer, and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians. Written from his own dictation by T. D. Hunter, and revised by him with Dr. Lynde, A. M., and Capt. T. H. Davis, M. D., Illustrated, \$1.00. Pp. 410. Macmillan & Co.

There are no doubt still some plainmen who remember "Jim" Beckwith and his wonderful adventures, though most of those who were his contemporaries have long since passed away. Mr. Leland knew of the old scene in his youth, and his reminiscences of that time and the then really wild West have prompted him to undertake this new edition of a book which was popular in its day, but which has for more than a generation been virtually forgotten. In his very interesting preface, Mr. Leland has much to say of those old times, when no man whose business called him into the West could reckon with any certainty upon keeping his "hair on" for twenty-four hours. Mr. Leland, indeed, tells an anecdote or two, the gist of which is that even at the present time there is plenty of danger to be apprehended from Indians in this country, as, for instance, the story of the man at the Langham Hotel, in London, who had not seen Indian bairns shot into him, and retained, and always would retain, three of them.

Mr. Leland, who is a veteran traveller, familiar with many lands, who has, like Ulysses, seen many realms, their people studied and their realms surveyed, gives the reader the benefit of his ripe judgment upon the value and especially the credibility of Beckwith's narrative. There is a sort of handicap upon the story, for frontiersmen generally seem to have held it as an article of faith that Jim was a phenomenal perverter of the truth—and some good stories are told among this alleged inventive propensity. But the editor has had a tolerably wide experience of frontiersmen, too, and he is convinced that, while Beckwith may make mistakes of detail, the main current of his narrative is true as related. It has been denied that he was ever head chief of the Crow nation, and alleged that at most he was only a sub-chief. Mr. Leland sees no sufficient reason for doubting the man's statement in this connection, however. The circumstances attending Beckwith's introduction to and affiliation with the Crows would account for almost any elevation in his case, and there seems no doubt that for many years those Indians held him in the highest estimation.

It is very possible that most men of the frontier type will think how more or less, and the temptation to do so must be particularly strong in a case like Beckwith's, where there was no white chivalry of witnesses to check his narrative. But however much he may have yielded to the temptation to "embroider" his adventures, they assuredly carry with them internal evidence of central truth, and the modern reader may probably accept them in the main with comparatively little discount. Once or twice, as for instance, on the occasion when the hero is represented as running ninety-five miles in one day while pursued by Indians, the reader cannot fail to enter a protest against the coolly stated prodigy. Beckwith himself evidently thinks that the story is a stiff one, for he backs it with others of the same kind—undoubtedly still less creditable. But as a rule the adventures related are such as might very well have happened to anybody in that wild country and lawless period, and there is no room for doubt as to their stirring character.

Jim Beckwith, like nearly all his class, received his frontier training in the service of a fur company. He was clearly an Ishmaelite by blood and birth, and there was, as his career demonstrated, a natural affinity between him and the Indians. The proximate cause of his joining the Crows was the invention and circulation by another scout of a story to the effect that he really was a Crow who had been stolen when a child and brought up among the whites. Indian mothers who had lost their babies during raids even went so far as to identify the young man, and he, falling into the hands of the thing, allowed himself to be thus reidentified. His complexion, daring and his many successful fights with the Indian foe of the Crows brought him great popularity, and on the whole there is nothing very astonishing in the fact that when their old chief died they should confer the leadership of the tribe upon one they had learned to regard as strongly belonging to them.

At all events Beckwith became to all practical intents a Crow Indian; lived in their wigwams, married their daughters, beat their raids and hunting parties and identified himself with them in all ways. His life throughout was one of adventure and peril—a life as only picked men could live through. The tribes on the plains were warring with one another all the time, and most of them with the white race, too. It is even said that Beckwith grew so demoralized that he was not above joining some of the hostile expeditions against white parties of travellers, and one or two who had known him previously claimed to have seen him engaged in such work. But these things were, so far as we can make out, never proved and Jim was given the benefit of the doubt. The general standard of morals on the plains at that time was no doubt unpleasantly low. It was every man for his own hand; and old frontiersmen, hunters, scouts and trappers were for the most part little or not at all troubled by conscientious scruples of any kind.

Whoever desires to read an old-fashioned and genuine story of life on the plains at the time when the buffalo ranged in immense herds, and the railroad as yet was not, and the red man dominated the situation, will find such a narrative in this volume. It was all dictated by Beckwith to Bonner, who had some ideas of editing, and put the story together clearly and acceptably. Now Mr. Leland has added his experience to the new edition and made it a fit number of the "Adventure Series," in whose ranks it will serve to perpetuate memories which the rapid changes of the years have already well nigh effaced.

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